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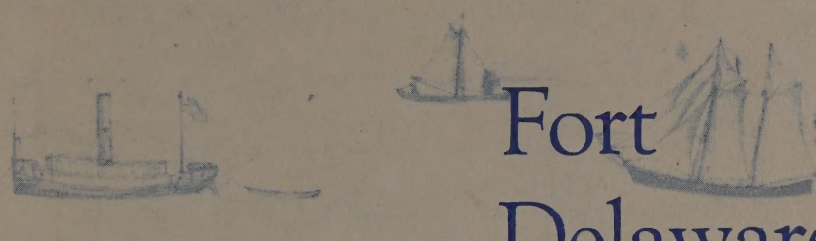
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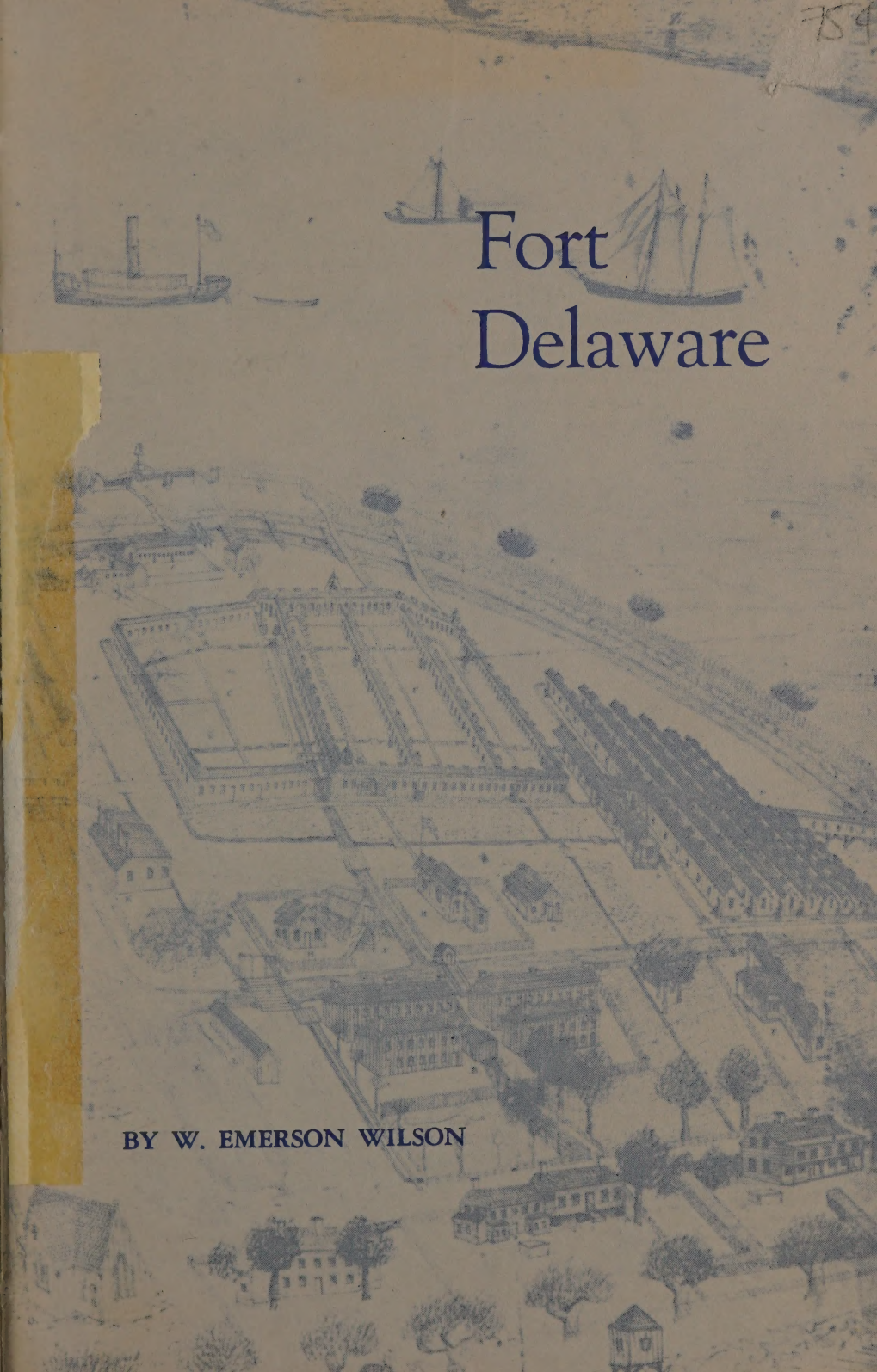
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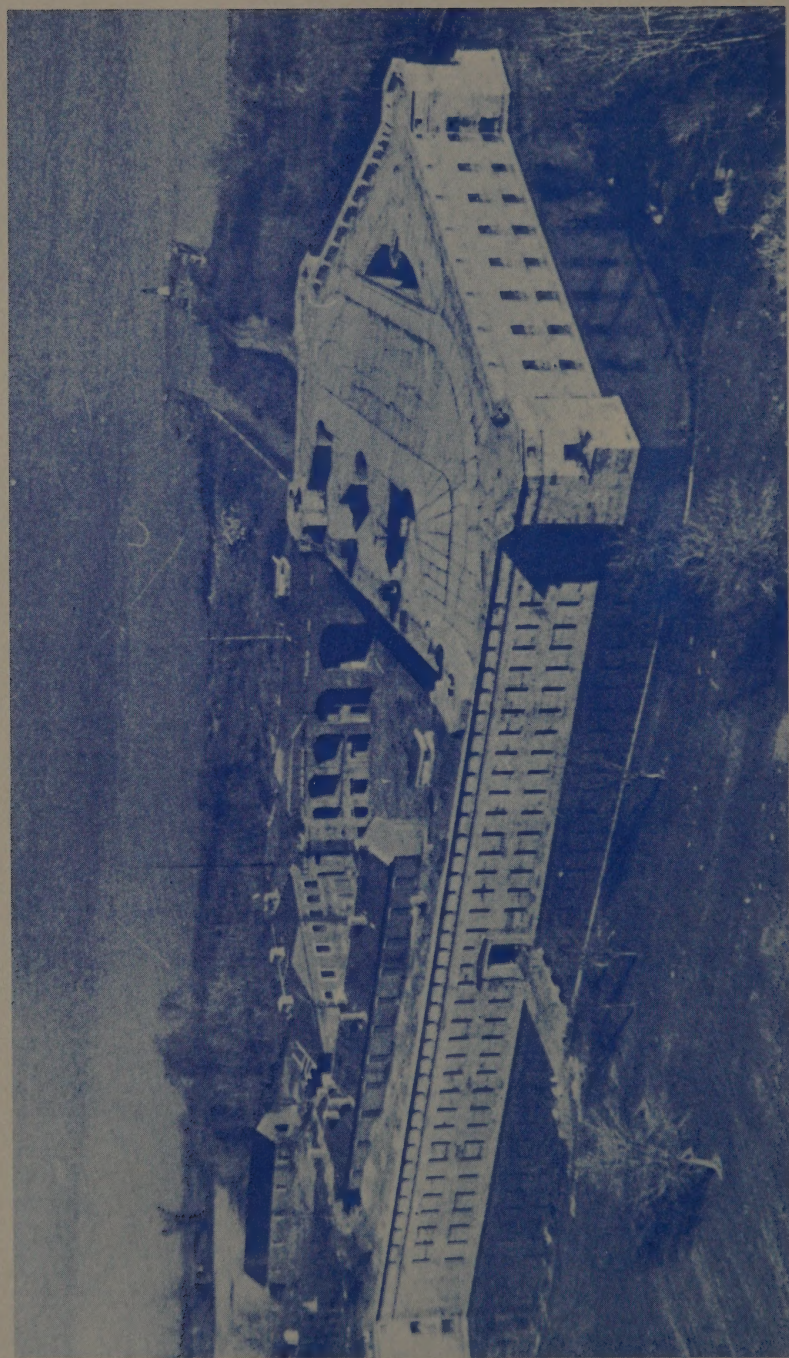
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Fort Delaware



BY W. EMERSON WILSON



The Fort as it Looks Today

Fort Delaware

BY W. EMERSON WILSON

UNIVERSITY of DELAWARE PRESS

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Fort Delaware

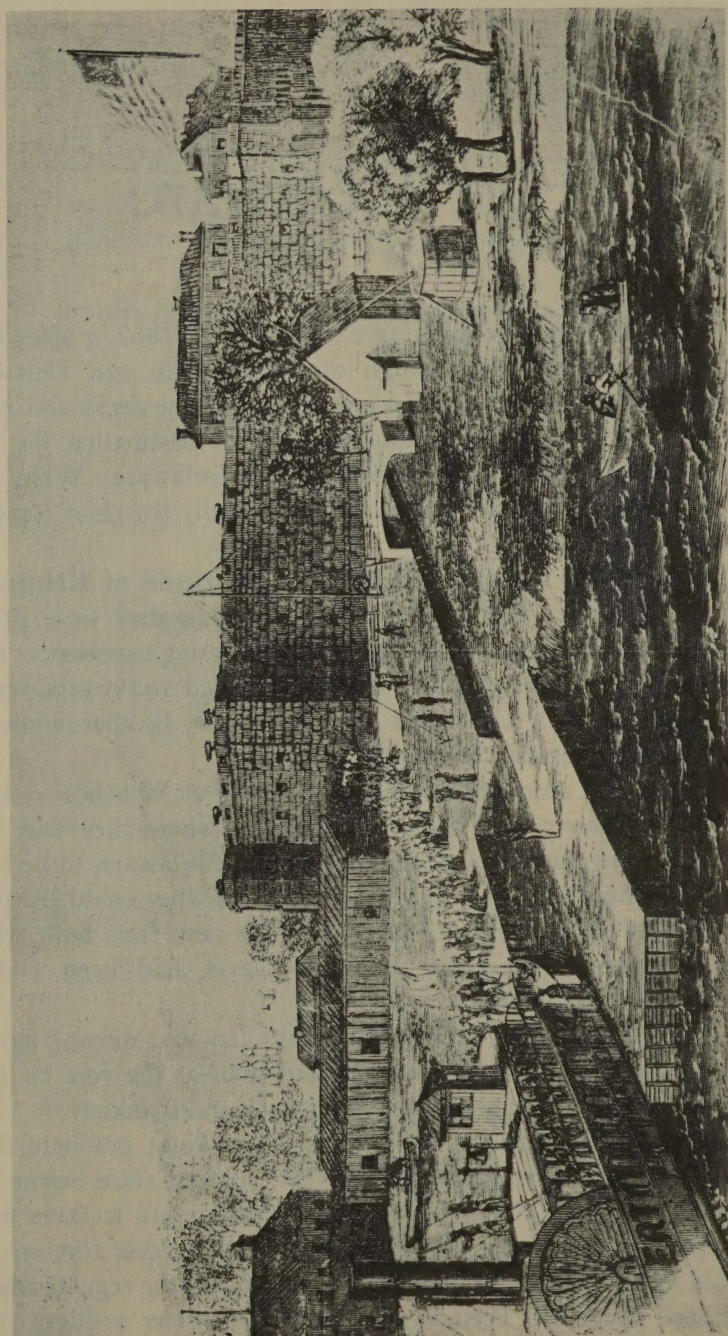
On a cool, windy morning early in April, 1862, a sidewheel steamer moved slowly through the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal with scores of gray-clad men crowding the decks and peering forward toward their destination. That destination the 258 Confederates on the ship knew was Fort Delaware. What sort of place Fort Delaware might be was naturally the chief topic of conversation.

These men had been captured at the Battle of Kernstown near Winchester, Virginia, on March 23, and they were proud Virginians. Their capture had been a humiliating experience; they had fought well, but they had been surrounded and overpowered. Among them was Lieutenant George Junkin, brother-in-law of their beloved general, Stonewall Jackson.

They had been imprisoned temporarily at Winchester, then at Harper's Ferry, and then at Baltimore, where they had first heard the news that they were going to Fort Delaware, to be held in prison there until the end of the war. All they could learn of Fort Delaware was that it was one of the new forts built when the Confederate President, Jefferson Davis, had been United States Secretary of War.

As the vessel was passing Delaware City and moving slowly toward Pea Patch Island the blue-clad men at the fort on that island were awaiting its arrival with even more anxiety.

Captain Augustus A. Gibson, a West Point graduate, had been in command for more than a year, actually since before the war had started. When he arrived he was proud to have been selected as commander of the biggest and strongest fort on the whole Eastern coast. As soon as the war began, the regular troops stationed there had been augmented by volunteer artillery regi-



Prisoners Arriving at Fort Delaware

ments from Pennsylvania. Only a month before, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton had stressed the importance of Captain Gibson's post and warned him to be on guard against Confederate ironclads such as the *Merrimac*, which might come up the Delaware.

The men of the garrison had become proficient in the handling of the fort's heavy guns, and they had built up a high state of morale. Now the commander had been informed that the proud fort was to become a prisoner-of-war camp. This was a blow not only to Captain Gibson but also to his men.

To make a place for these prisoners the garrison had to be crowded into the rooms on the third floor of the barracks on the western side of the courtyard. When the Baltimore boat docked at the fort, the Union soldiers were as sullen as the gray-clad prisoners who slowly came ashore.

Fort Delaware, the new, impregnable defense of the Delaware River, was now a mere prison camp. As a prison camp, strangely enough, it would be best known to history. But its story starts much earlier than the Civil War.

EARLY HISTORY

Colonial maps of the river show no island where Fort Delaware was later built; but as the island of today is in a bend of the river, it is probable that a mud shoal was always there. According to Kensey Johns, a chief justice of Delaware, the land showing above the water at high tide in the 1770's was no larger than a man's hat. Legend says that a boat loaded with peas foundered on this shoal and the peas sprouted. More mud built up around the vines, and the island gradually increased in size.

In May, 1794, Major Pierre L'Enfant, the man who had drawn the master plan for the city of Washington, was sent by the War Department to make a survey for additional sites for fortifications along the Delaware River.

He recommended that a fort be erected "upon the PipAsh, a bank forming an island opposite Eagle and Reedy Points." The major apparently gave a French phonetic spelling to Pea Patch for there are no other references to it as Pip Ash. Anyway, he felt

that with one fort at Eagle Point and another opposite "upon the Pip Ash Island" the whole river could be protected, "there being no other pass but a shallow channel east of the Pip Ash and running close to it, the width of the river toward Jersey being barren all over." No action was taken on Major L'Enfant's report at this time, but it was filed and kept in mind.

When the War of 1812 broke out, the need for river defenses became of major importance, especially as the citizens of Philadelphia had visions of the British fleet sailing up the river, unmolested, as far as the obsolete Fort Mifflin just outside that city. The national government made a formal request to the Delaware legislature that the island be ceded to it for military purposes, and in 1813 the legislature complied. Early the next year Captain Clark with a hundred soldiers and thirty laborers erected earthworks into which artillery was moved.

In 1816, with the war over, the government decided that the Delaware Valley must not be caught again in an undefended state, and funds were appropriated to construct a large and modern fort on Pea Patch. Major Samuel Babcock, who was placed in charge of the project, started construction in 1818. Not too much is known about the fort he built there, but it was completed by 1823. Soon trouble developed. Major Babcock had not provided a firm enough foundation, and as the fort settled great cracks appeared in the walls.

Major Benjamin K. Pierce, brother of the Franklin Pierce who later became President, was the commanding officer in 1830. Early in 1831 he was faced with both personal and military tragedy, for on February 9, 1831, his wife died in the fort, and on the next day the fort caught fire and the wooden roofs and floors of the barracks were destroyed. The major with difficulty moved his troops and his wife's body through the ice-filled river to New Castle, where the garrison was stationed in the Arsenal building.

DELAWARE-NEW JERSEY BOUNDARY DISPUTE

Some work toward rebuilding the fort was started in 1833, but in the meantime a legal controversy over ownership of the island developed. A certain Dr. Gale of New Jersey had claimed

that he held a warrant from the West Jersey proprietaries giving him control of the island. The United States District Court of New Jersey upheld his claim, but it was denied by the United States District Court of Delaware. After Dr. Gale's death, John Humphrey of New Jersey took over the claim and pressed it more strongly than Dr. Gale had ever done.

Finally all work on the island was halted in 1839, pending a settlement of Humphrey's claim. Senator John M. Clayton, a Delaware Whig who later became United States Secretary of State, and Senator James A. Bayard, a Delaware Democrat, made intensive studies of Delaware's claim to everything (the river included) within the 12-mile circle around New Castle, a claim that went back to a grant from the Duke of York, later James II, to William Penn.

John Sargent of Philadelphia was finally appointed as arbitrator of Humphrey's claims, and after protracted hearings he ruled, in 1848, in favor of Delaware. This long-drawn-out case was important in Delaware history, for it served as the basis of settling other boundary disputes which came up in later years.

REBUILDING THE FORT

The war with Mexico had now been fought and still the Delaware River lacked adequate defenses. In 1849 Congress appropriated funds for a new fort on the island and Joseph G. Totten, chief of engineers, assigned Major John Sanders to take charge of its construction. Remembering what had happened to Major Babcock's fort, Colonel Totten urged Major Sanders to see that adequate foundations were put in place. The major proceeded to sink pilings on the island, but was dismayed to find that they disappeared in the mud. (The pilings were trunks of white or yellow pine trees, one foot across and from forty-five to fifty feet in length; they were driven into the mud by steam-operated pile drivers.)

The need for more and more piling greatly increased the cost of construction so that by 1851, when the foundations were com-

plete, more than \$1,000,000 had been spent, so much in fact that Congress decided to catch its breath before sinking more money in the Pea Patch Island project. Thus work was suspended until early in 1854.

During that year 280 men were employed on the island. Most of them were skilled laborers, principally bricklayers, who received \$1.25 a day; but there were also some slaves, whose masters were paid forty cents a day for their labor.

By 1856 the fort as it now stands was two thirds complete. It was constructed in the shape of a pentagon, with granite outside walls and brick casemates within. The two sides facing down river were given over entirely to gun embrasures on two levels. There were also a number of gun embrasures on the side facing New Jersey and a few on the side facing north, but none on the Delaware side. Here the fort exposed nothing but narrow windows in the barracks built along that side. The administration building, with additional rooms for the garrison, faced the parade ground with the walls along the north side of the fort, and another building, smaller in size, extended along the inside of the New Jersey side of the fort. A moat about thirty feet wide surrounded the walls. It was crossed on the Delaware side by a drawbridge, which could be raised in case of enemy attack.

Early in 1856 Secretary of War Jefferson Davis informed the Senate that \$750,000 more should be appropriated at once if the fort was to be completed by 1859.

Jefferson Davis was not the only person to become famous in the Civil War who was interested in the fort in the 1850's. Captain George B. McClellan, later to be the commander-in-chief of the Northern Army, was stationed on the island for a time as assistant to Major Sanders. Captain James B. McPherson, who as a major general was to be killed leading the Union Army of the Cumberland in the Battle of Atlanta in 1864, was also there for a time before being transferred to another fort on another island, Alcatraz in California. Major Sanders was relieved of work on the fort in 1859 by Captain John Newton, who, as a major general, commanded the First Corps of the Union Army after the death of General Reynolds at Gettysburg in 1863. Major Robert

E. Lee, who would become leader of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, was never stationed there, as popular tradition insists, but while he was in the Engineer Corps he sent a number of letters to Major Sanders suggesting changes in the fort's plans as construction progressed.

By the end of 1859 the fort as it now stands was completed. The first troops were sent to the island in February, 1861, when Captain Gibson of the Third Artillery was placed in command, but the force consisted of only twenty men — at a time when seven states had already seceded to form the new Confederate States of America, and when the government could not be sure what action Delaware and Maryland would take if hostilities broke out.

The first guns did not arrive until May, 1861, when twenty 32-pound Columbiads and twenty howitzers were at last placed in the casemates and on the ramparts. Immediately after the surrender of Fort Sumter in April, Fort Delaware was reënforced by 130 men: fifty regular army artillerymen and the crack Commonwealth Artillery of Philadelphia. But the garrison of 150 men had to wait a full month before the guns arrived, and there seems little doubt that had Delaware seceded beforehand the fort could have been taken by the Confederates without too much difficulty.

As things turned out, the first year of the war was a quiet one for the garrison (which was augmented during the summer). The people of Wilmington and Philadelphia were greatly interested in this huge new bastion, and steamboats ran regular excursions to the island so that the people could see how well protected they were. The excursionists were allowed to wander at will through the fort until it was discovered, during late summer, that some excursionists, undoubtedly Southern sympathizers or spies, had spiked a few of the big guns. Then all excursions were banned.

That winter additional Pennsylvania artillery regiments arrived, but there was little of excitement until, in March of 1862, Stanton warned Captain Gibson to be on the watch for the *Merrimac* (or, as she was known in the Confederate Navy, the C. S. S. *Virginia*), an iron-clad vessel which was a severe threat to the wooden ships of the Union Navy. But the *Monitor*, with its armored turrets, soon ended that threat.

THE FORT A PRISON

Then early in April the quiet of Captain Gibson's life was shattered by the news that 258 Confederate prisoners from the Battle of Kernstown were arriving. He protested to Washington that he was commanding a fort on full war footing and that he had no place for prisoners, but Washington replied that it was up to him to find a place for them.



Corridor in Ramparts — Gun Emplacements on Left

So the proud Virginians were placed in rooms on the second floor of the barracks, over the sally port or main entrance to the fort. Legend says that there was not enough room there, and that some were placed in the dungeons. When the fort was built no provision had been made for dungeons, but directly behind each of the five bastions of the fort were small windowless rooms ventilated only by slits in the walls leading up to the roof of the fort. Each of these rooms was approached through a short brick corridor, at either end of which were brass-studded teakwood doors,

one at the entrance to the corridor and one to the dungeon itself. These rooms were intended for ammunition storage, but since the guns were all on the second tier or the ramparts, the first-floor storage rooms may have been used by Captain Gibson and his successors for the solitary confinement of unruly prisoners or those who attempted to escape. While there are no official records proving that these rooms were used for that purpose, some semblance of truth is given the legend by the fact, noted in newspaper descriptions of the fort written in the 1890's, that the wooden walls of these rooms contained inscriptions cut into them by the penknives of prisoners—the earliest dating from April, 1862. All of these wooden walls have since collapsed or have been removed.

ADDITIONAL QUARTERS FOR PRISONERS

While Gibson was protesting that he didn't have enough room to take care of the prisoners already at the fort, General John A. Dix at Baltimore was ordering four hundred more men there. A rush order to Philadelphia brought an army of carpenters to the island and wooden barracks were hurriedly thrown up in the parade ground. The prisoners were then moved into these buildings, which were described in the official reports as "shanties."

By April 22, 1862, General Montgomery Meigs, the Quartermaster General, had ordered the construction of additional wooden barracks on the island, north of the fort but under its guns. These were to be big enough to care for two thousand more prisoners. The new buildings were ready by June 15. Colonel William Hoffman, Commissary General of Prisoners, after an inspection, reported to the Secretary of War that the island was an ideal place for a large prison camp, and recommended that barracks to house five thousand more prisoners be erected at once.

Colonel Hoffman also recommended that Captain Gibson be promoted to Lieutenant Colonel because of the great increase in his duties and responsibilities. But poor Gibson didn't get his promotion. On top of all his other troubles, a group of citizens of Delaware City sent a petition to President Lincoln accusing him of being a Southern sympathizer and of meddling in Delaware

politics. But, because the accusation was silly, no action was taken against Gibson, although a charge was filed against him in the War Department.

Then on July 16, 1862, nineteen prisoners escaped. Captain Gibson called for reinforcements to the garrison, explaining that he had three thousand prisoners and less than three hundred guards. The following night two hundred more of the prisoners disappeared, and the Army finally began to take notice of Gibson's troubles. A guard boat was rushed from New York and directed to cruise around the island on a 24-hour basis. More troops were hurried to the island. Worried orders were sent to regiments stationed throughout the Delmarva Peninsula to be on the watch for the fugitives.



Commanding Officer's Staff at Fort Delaware in 1862

LEFT TO RIGHT: Capt. John J. Young, Capt. Franz von Schilling, Capt. Paul T. Jones, Maj. Henry S. Burton (commanding officer), Capt. J. S. Stevenson, Capt. Stanislaus Mlotkowski, Capt. David Schooley.

All this, however, was too much of a black mark against Gibson, who, a few days later, was transferred to active duty in the field. He was succeeded by Major Henry S. Burton, a big, burly, good-natured man, who ran the fort in an efficient manner, winning the respect of both prisoners and guards.

POLITICAL PRISONERS

Under Burton's administration the first political prisoners arrived at the fort. These were men who had been arrested and held without trial once President Lincoln had declared martial law in effect throughout the country. Among them were Judge Richard B. Carmichael of Easton, Maryland, who was dragged from his courtroom by Union troops, and Isaac C. W. Powell, clerk of his court; Stephen Joyce and Francis A. Richardson, editors of the *Baltimore Republican*, which had been suppressed (there is no freedom of the press under martial law); Madison Y. Johnson of Galena, Illinois, a personal friend of Lincoln but an advocate of peace; and many others.

There were scores of such prisoners from all parts of Delaware, but the one who was to get Major Burton into trouble was Warren J. Reed of Kent County. He had been teaching a class in a country school when arrested, and like the others he was never told what charge he faced. Reed's friends finally induced Secretary of War Stanton to order his release. George P. Fisher, Congressman from Delaware, wired Major Burton, warning him not to free Reed until the order could be rescinded, or at least until after the election, for Reed was active in the Democratic party. But Major Burton ignored the warning and released Reed. Fisher, who was a power in Washington, did not overlook this action and a week later Major Burton was superseded by Lieutenant Colonel Delevan D. Perkins.

Political prisoners were sent to the fort until the end of the war but later the Supreme Court, in the famous case known as *ex parte Milligan*, ruled that all of these men had been held illegally and that never again could a President declare martial law outside a combat area.

TREATMENT OF PRISONERS

A number of British officers and seamen who had been captured by the Union fleet off the southern coast while they were trying to run the blockade to take arms and supplies into the Confederacy, were held at Fort Delaware during this period. Some of them sent protests about their treatment to the British consul in Philadelphia, who visited them on Pea Patch and then sent a formal letter to Secretary of State William H. Seward on January 17, 1863.

The letter reads in part as follows: "The granite walls are wet with moisture, the stone floors damp and cold, the air impure. The prisoners have no beds, but must sleep on the floor, they have no water to wash with and are surrounded by filth and vermin." He demanded that these conditions be corrected at once. Seward, in forwarding the letter to Stanton, remarked that he had no doubt the report was exaggerated, but shortly afterward the British seamen were released.

Early in April, 1863, Colonel Robert C. Buchanan was appointed commandant of the fort to succeed Colonel Perkins. A doughty old regular Army man, he had, before the war, as commanding officer of a post in California, forced Captain Ulysses S. Grant to resign from the army or face charges of drunkenness. Buchanan's combat record with the Army of the Potomac was good, and he seemed to have many of the qualifications of a good executive officer. Unfortunately, just when he was putting into effect some of the plans he had for improving conditions at Fort Delaware, he was, for political reasons, transferred to other duty.

Brigadier General Albin F. Schoepf reported to Fort Delaware April 25, 1863, and remained as commander until January 1, 1866. Earlier in the war he had led troops in several battles in Kentucky and Tennessee, but with so little success that the War Department had finally decided he would be better off in charge of prisoners. By the time of his arrival most of the construction work on the island had been completed. Barracks had been built for 10,000 prisoners, and temporary quarters for extra guard regiments had also been erected. Additional hospital buildings were constructed under his direction so that eight hundred more pa-

tients could be cared for. These were built on the extreme northern end of the island, which was by now beginning to be considerably crowded.

When General Schoepf took over command of the fort there were 595 prisoners on the island; in May there were 1,255; in June, 3,737; and then in July, after the Battle of Gettysburg, the number reached its all-time peak of 12,595. By October this number had dropped to 6,498. For the remainder of the war the figures varied from the last total to 9,318 in August, 1864.

During the latter months of the war and for years afterward there were stories about the horrible suffering and the many deaths of Union prisoners in the Confederate prison at Andersonville, Georgia, yet the death rate there never reached more than 9% of the total number confined in any one month. By contrast the death rate at Fort Delaware during October, 1863, reached 12½% in spite of the fact that the North was never troubled with a lack of medical supplies such as the South had to face.

The Confederate government was indignant about the treatment received by the prisoners at Fort Delaware. On July 13, 1863, Robert Ould of Richmond, who had been placed in charge of exchanging Confederate prisoners for Union prisoners, sent a strong protest to Colonel William H. Ludlow, who held a similar post for the Union. He wrote: "Your people do worse than rob Confederate soldiers of their needful clothing. You take away their health and strength. You, yourself, see the living wrecks that come from Fort Delaware—men who went into that cruel keep, hale and robust, men inured to almost every form of hardship and proof against everything except the regimen of that horrible prison."

A little later Ould sent another sharply worded protest to Colonel Ludlow, in which he said: "Will you please explain the extraordinary delay in sending the Fort Delaware prisoners to us? They have been promised to us time and again and yet are drinking the poisonous water that has sent so many of their fellows to the grave. In the name of that common humanity to which we all, though enemies, belong, I beseech you to use every power of influence you have to change the place of confinement of our soldiers. If it must be that they are to be kept in Fort Delaware, my next earnest entreaty is that they shall be speedily delivered to us."

And again, on July 26, in a long letter discussing other matters, Ould complained: "Although you have many thousands of our soldiers now in confinement in your prisons and especially in that horrible hold of death—Fort Delaware—you have not for several weeks sent us any prisoners."

A few days later S. P. Moore, surgeon general, C. S. A., wrote the Confederate Secretary of War that he had reliable information from returned prisoners that the mortality at the fort was excessive and he urged that some official action be taken. A copy of his letter was sent through the lines to Washington with the notation: "Can nothing be done to stop the fearful mortality at Fort Delaware? Is it intended to fill our land with mourning by such means of subjugation?"

So Secretary of War Stanton finally asked General Schoepf for a report on conditions at the fort. The general denied that the death rate was higher than could be expected "taking into consideration that July and August are most fatal to exhausted men as was the case especially with those from Vicksburg."

On the other hand, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell of Philadelphia, a Northern surgeon who later became a famous novelist, inspected Fort Delaware on July 26, 1863, and called it "an inferno of detained rebels." Of conditions there he wrote as follows: "A thousand ill; twelve thousand on an island which should hold four; the general level three feet below low water mark; twenty deaths a day of dysentery and the living having more life on them than in them. Occasional lack of water and thus a Christian (!) nation treats the captives of its sword."

A month later Joseph K. Barnes, medical inspector general, United States Army, reported numerous cases of disease among the prisoners at Fort Delaware "due in part to the crowded condition of the prison," and he gave a long list of recommendations for changes there. He also noted that "the prisoners have no bedding and so little clothing that it is almost impossible to enforce cleanliness of person."

Conditions did not improve as fall came on, and H. R. Silliman, Union surgeon at the fort, reported on October 10 to George R. Suckley, acting medical director of the district, that 317 Confederates and fourteen political prisoners had died during Septem-

ber, adding that "the mortality is to me fearful and it is melancholy proof . . . of the unfitness of this wet island as a depot for large numbers of men." In forwarding this report to the Commissary General of Prisoners, Suckley endorsed it with the words: "This is a horrid mortality and I think mere humanity should cause us to select a more healthy place for prisoners of war."

Many of the deaths had been caused by an epidemic of small-pox which raged throughout the fall of 1863; thus when other prison camps started refusing to take any prisoners transferred from Fort Delaware for fear of the spread of the disease to those camps, Washington took notice and ordered medical inspectors to the island. They became especially disturbed when they found that members of the garrison were also contracting the disease. During the three months the epidemic was at its height, 163 Union soldiers contracted it and fourteen died. During the same period 1,625 prisoners were hospitalized and 861 died.

The medical inspectors worked hard to curb the disease, vaccinating all prisoners and guards and setting up a contagious hospital near Finn's Point, New Jersey, not far from where the graveyard had been established. General Schoepf reported there were so many deaths during the fall that it was impossible to dig individual graves, although pine coffins were provided and placed in long trenches.

PRISONERS WITHIN THE WALLS

While there was great suffering among the prisoners held in the barracks on the island, life was much easier for the prisoners held inside the fort itself. These were comparatively few, however, consisting merely of high-ranking officers. Generals usually had rooms to themselves, while other officers above and including the rank of major were confined in the large rooms over the sallyport. At times as many as 160 of these officers were housed in one of these big rooms.

The first general to arrive as a prisoner was Brigadier General J. J. Pettigrew of North Carolina, who had been wounded and captured at the Battle of Seven Pines; he was held at the fort dur-

ing the summer of 1862. After his exchange he was promoted to major general and led a division in Pickett's charge at Gettysburg.

Brigadier General T. J. Churchill, who was captured at Arkansas Post in January, 1863, was first held prisoner at Camp Chase, and then sent to Fort Delaware. When he was exchanged in the spring, he complained that his watch, his money, and even his overcoat had been taken from him and never returned.

Brigadier General James J. Archer of Maryland, who was captured on the first day at Gettysburg, arrived early in July and promptly made plans for overpowering the garrison and taking over the fort. While his exact plan for doing this is not known, it is believed to have been similar to that later worked out by McHenry Howard and described in his book *Reminiscences of a Maryland Confederate*. The Union garrison stacked their arms along each side of the sally port. Occasionally the prisoners were marched out of the fort to the river to bathe; and it was decided that as the prisoners marched past the stacked guns they could, upon a given signal, seize the guns, overpower the guards, close the gate and take possession of the fort. Then they could turn the cannon on the other Union troops on the island and force them to surrender. Whatever General Archer's plan was, it was discovered before he could carry it out and he was quickly transferred. Howard's plan, too, came to naught.

Major General Franklin Gardner of Louisiana, who was captured at Port Hudson on the Mississippi in July, 1863, and Brigadier General Robert Vance, brother of Governor Zebulon Vance of North Carolina, were other prisoners stationed within the walls of the fort.

Brigadier General Jeff Thompson of Missouri arrived at Delaware City in February, 1864, and was taken over to the island in a small boat. In his autobiography he tells of how the boat dodged cakes of ice as it bobbed about among the waves. He says that that trip made him have even greater respect for Washington than he had before, but that at least, in his own crossing of the Delaware, he had not tried to stand up in the boat. During his imprisonment General Thompson wrote a number of poems which were later published. Another poet, Major Lamar Fontaine of Mississippi, who wrote the words for the famous Civil War song "All

Quiet Along the Potomac Tonight," was a prisoner with General Thompson.

At the Bloody Angle of Spottsylvania, Major General Edward Johnson, known affectionately as "Old Allegheny," was captured with 4,000 of his division. He and Brigadier General George H. Stuart, like most of the officers and men taken at that time, ended up in Fort Delaware. General Johnson, a bluff, hearty old man, loved to play poker with his fellow prisoners; but as he had a nervous tic in his left cheek which became especially noticeable when he had a good hand, he generally lost.



Confederate Prisoners Confined at Fort Delaware During the Civil War

FRONT ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Col. Joseph T. Tucker, Ky. (2); Capt. Hart Gibson, Ky. (4); Brig. Gen. Robert B. Vance, N. C. (6); Rev. Dr. I. W. K. Handy (8); Baily Peyton Key, Tenn., 15-year-old orderly (9); Brig. Gen. Jeff Thompson, Mo. (11); Col. W. W. Ward Tenn. (12).

REAR ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Capt. H. H. Brogden, Md., Confederate Secret Service (1); Lt. Lucius H. Smith, Ky. (3); Lt. Jos. J. Andrews, Ala. (5); Col. Cicero Coleman, Ky. (7); Col. R. G. Morgan, Ky. (10); Capt. Charlton H. Morgan, Ky. (13); Brig. Gen. Basil W. Duke, Ky. (14); Lt. John A. Tomlinson, Ky. (15).

Brigadier General Basil W. Duke of Kentucky, brother-in-law of General John H. Morgan and second in command of Morgan's Raiders on their ill-fated expedition through Indiana and Ohio, later wrote an amusing account of his gambling activities in

the fort. He was the general who had charge of the Confederate treasure on the retreat from Richmond.

During the summer of 1864 sixty officers, including seven generals, were sent from Fort Delaware to be placed under the fire of Confederate guns at Charleston in retaliation for similar treatment of Union prisoners; but they were exchanged almost upon arrival. Shortly after the exchange had been completed the Confederate commander placed six hundred Union prisoners in the path of the fire of the Union guns, thinking he might be able to make an even bigger trade next time. So six hundred more officers from Fort Delaware were sent to an island off Charleston, but this time the Union did not agree to an exchange. After several weeks under fire they were scattered among other prisons and finally, in March, 1865, returned to Fort Delaware. Several books have been written about the sufferings of this group, which was known as "The Immortal Six Hundred."

Among the generals who were still prisoners when the war ended were Brigadier General Robert L. Page of Virginia, captured at Fort Morgan after the Battle of Mobile Bay, and Brigadier General Rufus L. Barringer, a North Carolina cavalry leader. General Page had served in the United States Navy before the war, and in the Confederate Navy later; then when no vessel was available, he had been transferred to the Confederate Army.

The Reverend Dr. I. W. K. Handy, Presbyterian pastor of several Delaware churches, was a political prisoner who shared quarters with the generals during most of his stay at the fort. He had been living at Portsmouth, Virginia, when the war started, and in 1863 he received permission to visit his wife's family, the Dilworths of Bridgeville. While staying with them he was arrested and taken to the fort. He was never told what charge there was against him, but he understood that he had been denounced for uttering southern sentiments in Port Penn on his way to Bridgeville. He kept a day-by-day account of everything that happened at Fort Delaware from July, 1863, until October, 1864, when he was sent South in exchange for a Northern preacher held by the Southerners. He later published a 672-page diary, which provides the best picture available of life in the fort.

THE URGE TO ESCAPE

Just how many Confederates escaped from Pea Patch Island during the war will probably never be known. The official records list only fifty-four escapes for the period from June, 1863, until the end of the war. (We also know that 219 escaped in the mass exodus which proved to be the downfall of Captain Gibson back in July, 1862.) On the other hand, Dr. Handy's diary informs us that in this period "the number of escapes since Gettysburg is truly astonishing . . . Some think that not less than 1,000 have gotten off the island." This estimate is, of course, far too high, but the number contained in the official records seems to be too low and the records have been proved to contain many inaccuracies. Possibly five hundred for the whole war would be closer to the actual figure.

A story in the *Richmond Despatch* for August 28, 1863, tells of the escape of ten prisoners from Fort Delaware on one night, while the official records list only eight for the whole month. The men, whose names are given in the newspaper, were from the 9th Georgia, the 18th Mississippi, and Stuart's Horse Artillery. They tied canteens around their bodies and swam ashore. One of the group was drowned. Two other prisoners, both from the Louisiana Tigers, have left accounts of how they made life preservers by cutting up their rubber raincoats, sewing the pieces together, and inflating them like balloons. Most of those who swam ashore landed in the vicinity of Delaware City, although two men caught on an incoming tide were swept as far north as the mouth of the Christina River before getting ashore.

There are several accounts of unsuccessful attempts to escape, some prisoners being shot and killed in the water near the island by the guards. Another prisoner, who was drifting down the river south of Delaware City, was picked up by a ship and taken to Lewes, where the pilot turned him over to Federal authorities.

On the whole, however, there are few records of prisoners being recaptured after they had reached the Delaware shore. There was an efficient underground railroad of Southern sympathizers in Delaware which took charge of these escaped prisoners, provided them with civilian clothes, hid them during the day, and then

passed them along by night through Delaware into Maryland, where they were taken across the Chesapeake into Virginia and the Confederate lines.

At least two cases of prisoners being shot and killed while not trying to escape are known. Colonel E. P. Jones of Virginia, who was suffering from a foot wound, was ordered by a guard to walk faster while on his way to a latrine. When the colonel was unable to do so because of his wound, Private William Douglass of the 157th Ohio Regiment fired and the colonel fell mortally wounded. His death drew an official protest from the Confederate Congress, which cited this incident as an example of the atrocities committed in Northern prisons.

To enforce cleanliness around the barracks, General Schoepf issued an order forbidding prisoners to throw anything from the windows. On December 20, 1864, Private John Deakyne of the 9th Delaware Regiment, a guard, warned a prisoner several times to stop breaking this rule, and when the prisoner persisted, he fired at the window. The bullet struck and killed Private John Bibb of the Charlottesville, Virginia, Artillery, who was just getting out of bed. Private Deakyne was exonerated by a courtmartial, which also ruled that Private Bibb was innocent of any infraction of the prison rules at the time of his death.

OATHS OF ALLEGIANCE

The North made no attempt to "brainwash" the prisoners at Fort Delaware, but every effort was made to win over Southerners to the Union, or at least to get them out of the war. Thus a prisoner was offered all kinds of inducements such as better food and lodgings to get him to take the oath of allegiance. Hundreds of prisoners did so, and became known as "galvanized Yankees" by their former comrades.

A few of these men went the whole way and joined the Union army, and some of these were kept at the fort as part of Captain George Ahl's Independent Battery. They are reported to have been the harshest of the guards in their treatment of prisoners. Others were released with the pledge they would not again go South, and still others who had no place to go in the North remained on the

island in special quarters and were paid to do maintenance work. On the whole, the number of Confederates who took the oath of allegiance was small compared with the total number of prisoners, representing about the same percentage as Union prisoners in the South who took similar oaths to the Confederacy.

A prisoner who took the oath, then rejoined the Southern army, was subject to the death penalty if recaptured. Lieutenant Junkin, who was among the first arrivals (back in April, 1862), was one of these. Although Junkin was the brother-in-law of Stonewall Jackson, his father was a strong Union man who had a special permit signed by Lincoln for the young soldier's release if he would take the oath. His father pleaded with him at the fort to do so, but Junkin refused. Later his father returned and said his mother was at the point of death; so Junkin took the oath in order to go to her bedside. When he found his mother in good health, he was so disgusted that he went through the lines and again joined the Confederate army. He was not recaptured.

THE BRIGHTER SIDE

Prison life, it must be admitted, did have its brighter side. Most of the Confederates were young men whose education had been interrupted; so with plenty of time on their hands, they decided to catch up on the classes they were missing. Lectures were given on all types of subjects, one British sea captain drawing especially large crowds for his talks on his travels throughout Europe and the Orient. Certain officers from Louisiana held classes in French, and there were also courses in Greek and Latin, and in higher mathematics. Some even studied law under officers who had been members of the bar at home.

As an extracurricular activity a four-page newspaper, *The Fort Delaware Prison Times*, was issued, with Captain George S. Thomas, 64th Georgia, and Lieutenant A. Harris, 32nd Florida, as co-editors. With no printing press available, the whole paper was copied in "the small but very clear handwriting of Captain J. W. Hibbs, 13th Virginia Cavalry."

The prisoners also spent many weeks preparing a minstrel show with original sketches and songs, for which both words and

music were written by prisoners. Debates were held almost nightly on a wide variety of subjects ranging from aspects of the war to questions concerning sex and religion.

In order to get money to buy extra food from the sutlers, some of the prisoners operated barber shops, others tailor shops and laundries. Those with more of an artistic bent made rings from gutta-percha buttons, carved knives and forks from bones, fashioned knicknacks from peach pits and hickory nuts, or wove fans from dried reeds. These they sold to the guards, who, when they were veterans of combat action, were generally friendly toward the prisoners. Only the "galvanized Yankees" and those Union soldiers who had never been in battle were ever accused of brutality.

UNION GARRISON FROM MANY STATES

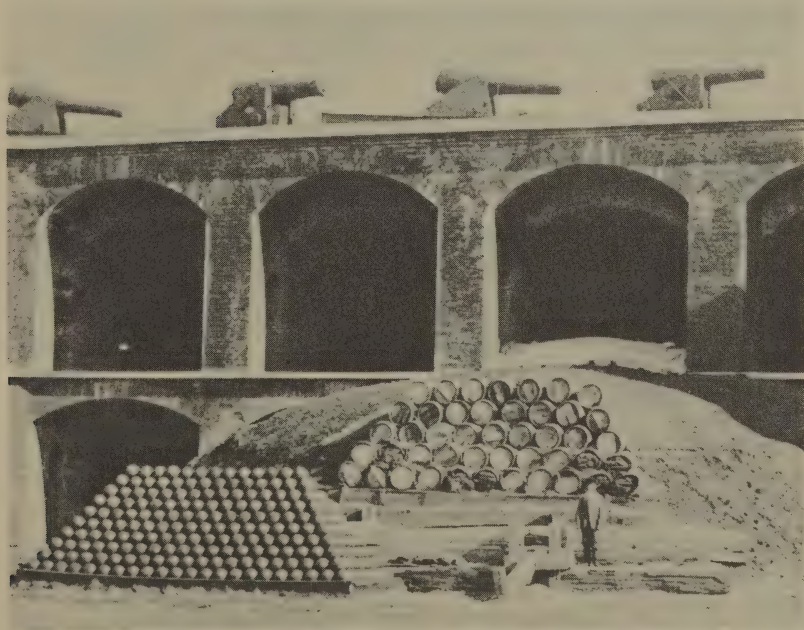
There were all types of Union soldiers at the fort. The companies of regular army men kept to man the guns in case of an emergency had little contact with the Confederates. They were professional soldiers, and as most of them were Germans, they were called "Dutchmen" by both the prisoners and the other Union men. The volunteer artillery regiments, mostly from Pennsylvania, left the fort for active duty in Virginia shortly after the first prisoners arrived. Some Sussex units of the Fourth Delaware Regiment were on the island when the 219 prisoners escaped. Accused of Southern sympathies, they were quickly transferred.

In June, 1863, when Lee's army advanced into Pennsylvania, the Fifth Delaware Regiment, which had been guarding the Du Pont Powder Works, was ordered to the fort to relieve some veteran units needed at the front. Captain Lammot du Pont was the commander of one of the companies of the Fifth Delaware. This regiment remained at the fort until August. The Purnell Legion, a Maryland Regiment commanded by W. H. Purnell (who had been postmaster of Baltimore when he organized the unit, and who was for many years after the war president of Delaware College, forerunner of the University of Delaware), was at the fort during the fall of 1863.

The Fifth Maryland Regiment, which, like the Purnell Legion, had seen heavy action, moved in to succeed the latter outfit. These veterans were respected by the prisoners; but they were soon replaced by the 157th Ohio, composed of men who had enlisted for only ninety days, and these Ohio men were despised for their unnecessary harshness. They were followed in the summer of 1864 by the Sixth Massachusetts, the same outfit which had suffered the first casualties of the war when fired on in Baltimore in April, 1861. The Ninth Delaware Regiment took over in the fall of 1864 and remained until the end of the war. They had been recruited specifically for guard duty at the fort.

THE WAR DRAWS TO A CLOSE

Since the artillerymen rarely fired the guns of the fort even in practice, the prisoners were especially startled on April 4, 1865, when the cannon started roaring. It was a one-hundred-gun salute



Civil War Guns and Cannon Balls Inside the Fort

to celebrate the fall of Richmond. Naturally this cast a deep gloom over the Confederates; but less than a week later, on April 10, the fort once more shook to its foundations as two hundred guns announced the surrender of General Lee. Adjutant Francis Boyle of North Carolina wrote in his diary that despair was so great on the tenth of April that all lessons and other activities were suspended, the prisoners gathering to discuss the black future that lay ahead for the South.

But the rejoicing was great among the Union officers and men, who saw the end of the war approaching. Their attitude toward the prisoners relaxed and there was much fraternization. General Schoepf assured speedy release for those who would take the oath.

Then on Easter Sunday this era of good feeling came to an abrupt end. The guns of the fort again started rumbling, but this time they were "chanting a slow and measured requiem over Abraham Lincoln." The guards were doubled along the walls; then the prisoners were assembled and told the news, being warned that if any one of them showed the least sign of rejoicing, he would be shot down. All mail was suspended, rations were scantier than ever, and the sutler's shop was closed so that the prisoners could not buy extra food.

This strictness continued until after the surrender of Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston, when prisoners were again permitted to take the oath. Even though all were convinced that the Confederacy no longer existed, only about 1,000 agreed to take the hated oath up to June 27. On that date the remaining 7,000 prisoners were released by order of General Grant.

As these thousands were leaving the island, a small group of new prisoners arrived. They were headed by Lieutenant General Joseph S. Wheeler, the highest ranking general ever to be held at the fort, and they included Burton S. Harrison, private secretary to Jefferson Davis; Governor Francis Lubbock of Texas, and Colonel William P. Johnston, aide to President Davis. Wheeler, a famous cavalry leader, had refused to surrender with General Johnston, and was trying to get to Texas to continue the war when captured. He was accused of violating the terms of Johnston's surrender. The others were taken with President Davis and faced po-

litical charges. All but Harrison were released during the summer or fall. Harrison's fiancée, Constance Cary, a Richmond belle, tried her best to visit him in prison, but Stanton had ordered that he be closely confined. Finally she persuaded General Schoepf to allow her to stand in the parade ground of the fort while Harrison waved to her from the upper tier of casemates.

Late in August, Brigadier General William Hoffman, commissary general of prisoners, made his last inspection trip to Pea Patch Island and reported that "the vacated barracks are infested with rats, which are driven by hunger to every house on the island. All the corn growing in the gardens has been destroyed by them and it is desirable that the barracks should be removed as soon as possible."

Some three hundred Union convicts still held on the island dismantled the wooden barracks and were moved into casemates in the fort. All but five companies of the garrison had gone home by the first of September. In January, 1866, Harrison was released, the convicts were transferred to other prisons and General Schoepf was mustered out of the service. The fort was back on a peacetime footing.

AFTERMATH

In 1869 General Bernard, who made an inspection of Delaware River defenses, reported that Fort Delaware, which was only ten years old, was already obsolete. Naval armament had made great strides during the war and the battleships of 1869 were equipped with guns which could pierce the walls of the fort. He suggested that additional fortifications be constructed on the Delaware shore on the site of what later became Fort Du Pont (where a battery had been established in 1863), and on the New Jersey shore on the site of what was to become Fort Mott.

The government, however, was not prepared to spend the immense amount of money that would be required for these additions. In fact its interest in Fort Delaware dwindled to the point where, in 1870, the garrison was withdrawn and only a handful of men left as a caretaker force. Then followed a long period

of quiet and neglect. There was some work done on the fort and on the Delaware battery in 1872, and again in 1878, but this did not amount to much.

THE OLD FORT IS "MODERNIZED"

Through the 1880's the strength and firepower of battleships steadily increased, and there was no longer any question about the obsolescence of the fort. Early in the 1890's the War Department drew up plans for establishing up-to-date fortifications on the Delaware. Congress voted an appropriation in 1896, and work started again on Pea Patch Island in 1897.



*Emplacements for 12-inch Guns
Construction in Progress Just Before the Spanish-American War*

The three-story brick building on the west side of the parade ground extended along the whole length of that side. Since the emplacements for the modern guns were to be inside the walls of the fort, all of that part of the building south of the sallyport was torn down. Another brick building which extended along

the New Jersey side was also razed; and then the work of building the concrete emplacements for the three 12-inch disappearing guns was started. Under these emplacements was space for ammunition storage rooms, and there were elevators to take the shells from the ground floor up to the guns. Generators to supply electricity for the elevators, for lights, and for the firing of the guns were also installed. But the work inside the walls was only a part of the modernization plans. On the north end of the island a mine-control center was built of concrete and covered with a huge mound of earth.

Three batteries of 3-inch guns were also constructed on the island south of the fort. They were given the names Battery Allen, Battery Alburtis and Battery Dodd, while the three big guns inside the walls were known as Battery Torbert.

But with all this activity, Fort Delaware still was inferior in fire power to Fort Du Pont on the Delaware shore and Fort Mott on the New Jersey side of the river. Fort Du Pont's armament consisted of two 8-inch mortar batteries, two 12-inch disappearing guns, two 8-inch guns, and four 5-inch guns. Fort Mott was provided with three 12-inch guns, three 10-inch guns, four 5-inch guns and two 3-inch guns.

In addition, provisions were made for an outer mine field to be laid across the river just north of Elsinboro Point, and an inner one some one thousand yards south of Pea Patch. With all these modern guns able to concentrate their fire at given points on the river the defenses of the Delaware were again considered impregnable.

All of this work had not been completed at the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898, but the public knew that the work was in progress and felt relatively secure when other ports on the Atlantic seaboard were in fear of an attack by the Spanish Fleet, then centered at Santiago in Cuba. During most of that brief war Fort Delaware was fully manned by Coast Artillery troops; but once peace was restored, Pea Patch Island again settled down to a quiet period. Fort Du Pont became the headquarters for the three forts, and only a squad or two were assigned to Fort Delaware to keep the modern guns in condition for an emergency.

FORT DELAWARE IN THE PRESENT CENTURY

There was another flurry of excitement when war was declared in 1917, and more men were sent to the island; but after November 11, 1918, Fort Delaware resumed its lethargy. In the 1920's the last of the Civil War cannon and cannonballs were sold for scrap, and the few remaining buildings outside the fort were removed to Fort Du Pont.

As World War II approached there was some additional activity when National Guard regiments, including Delaware's 261st Coast Artillery, spent brief periods there. These troops were housed in the old barracks where the Confederate officers had been kept, and many of the walls of these rooms have scrawled initials and the dates 1940 and 1941.

By this time, construction had been started on Fort Miles at Lewes, which now became the principal defense of the Delaware River. When it was completed late in 1942, the Army moved the big guns from Fort Delaware to Watervliet Arsenal in New York State, dismantled all the metal that could be used for scrap (such as the bronze bars in the windows facing the moat), and sent the remaining soldiers and their families to Fort Du Pont. Before long, weeds and underbrush covered the parade ground and the ramparts.

In 1945 the fort and the island were declared surplus property. With both entirely deserted, vandals moved in, ripped up cables, tore out iron stairways, and garnered every bit of scrap they could find. Others out of pure malice shattered all the glass remaining in the windows. When no governmental agency showed interest in fort or island, the island (though not the fort) was offered for lease. The high bidder, a resident of Hockessin, Delaware, used his holding as a game reserve.

Meantime Delaware officials decided the island should be returned to the state, and United States Representative J. Caleb Boggs introduced a bill in Congress for its return. The bill was passed and signed by President Truman in 1948, but no plans were made for use of the island and only vandals visited it.

In December, 1949, a group of newspapermen from Wilmington investigated conditions on the island and were shocked at

the damage which had been done to this historic landmark. As a result of their story in the *Wilmington Morning News*, some twenty men met in the Hotel Du Pont early in January, 1950, and organized the Fort Delaware Society. This society grew rapidly, and by 1956 there were more than two hundred members.

A bill sponsored by the society was introduced in the State Legislature in 1951 to turn the fort and island over to the State Park Commission and to provide for a caretaker. This measure was promptly approved by the Legislature and signed by Governor Elbert N. Carvel.

Despite the lack of proper docking facilities on the island, the society sponsored trips to Fort Delaware on five week-ends during the summer of 1954, and proved the potential tourist interest in the site when more than 6,000 persons visited the island. The 1955 session of the General Assembly granted an appropriation large enough to provide a dock on the island and to make regular trips possible (at cost) each summer. Although there is still much work to be done on the fort and island, the site is expected to attract national attention during the Centennial of the Civil War between 1961 and 1965.

Hampered though it has been by lack of funds, the State Park Commission, first under John C. Hazzard, then under Nathan Miller, and now under Leon H. Ryan, has stopped the vandalism, cleared away the underbrush, and prepared the way for developing Fort Delaware into one of the most attractive state historical parks in the East.

FOR FURTHER READING

For the early history of Fort Delaware and for construction details, see *American State Papers, Military Affairs*, vols. 1 and 2 (1832, 1834).

For a detailed day-by-day account of life at Fort Delaware, July 1863-Oct. 1864, see Rev. Isaac W. K. Handy, *United States Bonds; or, Duress by Federal Authority* (1874). The diary of a prisoner at the fort, Feb.-May 1863, is in George Baylor, *Bull Run to Bull Run* (1900).

There is a wealth of material about Fort Delaware in the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, published by the U. S. Government (128 vols., 1880-1901). See especially Series II, vols. 3-8.

John A. Marshall, *American Bastile* (1883), has much of value on political prisoners.

William B. Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons* (1930), is a general work.

Southern Historical Society Papers, I (1876) is a Southern report on the "atrocities" committed in northern prisons, with emphasis on Fort Delaware. For a prisoner's diary see vols. II and III.

Other worthwhile works by Southerners include: Mrs. Burton Harrison, *Recollections Grave and Gay* (1911); Belle Boyd, *Belle Boyd in Camp and Prison* (1865); *Reminiscences of General Basil W. Duke* (1911); *North Carolina Regiments*, IV, which contains a chapter entitled "Two Years a Prisoner at Fort Delaware"; E. W. Rich, *Comrades* (1898); Fritz Fuzzlebug [John Dunkle], *Prison Life during the Rebellion* (1869); *Papers of Randolph Abbott Shotwell* (1931); McHenry Howard, *Recollections of a Maryland Confederate* (1914); Ogden Murray, *Immortal Six Hundred* (1903); M. P. Andrews, *Women of the South in War Times* (1927); John P. Dyer, *Fighting Joe Wheeler* (1941); and D. S. Freeman, *Calendar of Confederate Military Papers* (1908).

For Northern accounts of life in Fort Delaware see: J. W. Hanson, *Historical Sketch of the Old Massachusetts Sixth Regiment* (1866); J. Polk Racine, *Recollections of a Veteran* (1894); W. J. Fletcher, *A Soldier for One Hundred Days* (1955); U. S. Christian Commission, *Second Annual Report* (1863); Anna Robeson Burr, *Weir Mitchell* (1929); and U. S. Sanitary Commission, *Narrative of Privations and Sufferings of United States Officers and Soldiers While Prisoners of War . . . and Treatment of Rebel Prisoners in the North* (1864).

The Fort Delaware Society issues a periodical, *Fort Delaware Notes*, in which is published newly found material on the fort. The society is a natural repository for manuscript letters, documents, etc., dealing with the history of the fort. Persons having such material are urged to communicate with the Fort Delaware Society, Box 1251, Wilmington, Delaware.

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The Moat — Along the Delaware Side of the Fort



Fort Delaware and Pea Patch Island

As sketched by the Topographical Engineer of the Fort, Max Neugas,

Nov. 1, 1864

